

**CATAWBA COUNTY
VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT ORDINANCE**

**ARTICLE I
TITLE**

An ordinance of the Board of County Commissioners of CATAWBA COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, entitled, "**VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT ORDINANCE.**"

**ARTICLE II
AUTHORITY**

The articles and sections of this ordinance are adopted pursuant to authority conferred by the N.C.G.S. Sections 106-735 through 106-744 and Chapter 153A.

**ARTICLE III
PURPOSE**

The purpose of this ordinance is to promote agricultural values and the general welfare of the county and more specifically, increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life; encourage the economic and financial health of agriculture; and increase protection from non-farm development and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

**ARTICLE IV
DEFINITIONS**

The following are defined for purposes of this ordinance:

Advisory Board: Catawba County Agricultural Advisory Board.

Chairperson: Chairperson of the Catawba County Agricultural Advisory Board.

District: Voluntary Agricultural District as established by this ordinance.

Board of
Commissioners: Catawba County Board of Commissioners.

**ARTICLE V
AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD**

A. Creation

The Board of Commissioners shall establish an Agricultural Advisory Board to implement the provisions of this program.

B. Membership

The Advisory Board shall consist of no less than nine members appointed by the Board of Commissioners.

C. Membership Requirements

1. Each Advisory Board member shall be a Catawba County resident and/or landowner.
2. All members shall be actively engaged in farming.
3. One member shall be selected from each of the County's seven Small Area Plan districts.
4. One member shall be an individual recommended by the Soil & Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors.
5. One member shall be an individual recommended by the Catawba County Farm Bureau Board of Directors
6. The members shall be selected for appointment by the Board of Commissioners from the names of individuals submitted to the Board of Commissioners by the Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors, the County Office of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, the U.S. Farm Service Agency County Committee, County Farm Bureau, Natural Resources Conservation Service, nonprofit agricultural organizations, conservation organizations, agribusiness, and the public at large.

D. Tenure

The initial board is to consist of three appointees for terms of two years and three appointees for terms of three years and three appointees for terms of four years. Thereafter, all appointments are to be for terms of three years, with reappointment permitted.

E. Vacancies

Any vacancy on the Advisory Board is to be filled by the Board of Commissioners for the remainder of the unexpired term.

F. Removal

Any member of the Advisory Board may be removed by the Board of Commissioners upon a two-thirds vote of the Commissioners. No cause for removal shall be required. All members are subject to Catawba County Code section 15.05 regarding absences of board members.

G. Funding

The *per diem* compensation, if any, of the members of the Advisory Board may be fixed by the Board of Commissioners and funds may be appropriated to the Advisory Board to perform its duties.

H. Advisory Board Procedure

1. Chairperson

The Advisory Board shall elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson each year at its first meeting of the fiscal year. The chairperson shall preside over all regular or special meetings of the Advisory Board. In the absence or disability of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson shall preside and shall exercise all the powers of the chairperson. Additional officers may be elected as needed.

2. Jurisdiction

The Advisory Board may adopt rules of procedure not inconsistent with this ordinance or with other provisions of State law.

3. Advisory Board Year

The Advisory Board shall use the Catawba County fiscal year as its meeting year.

4. Meetings

Meetings of the Advisory Board shall be held at the call of the chairperson and at such other times as the Advisory Board may specify in its rules of procedure or upon the request of at least a majority of the Advisory Board Membership. A meeting shall be held at least annually. Notice of any meetings to the members shall be in writing unless otherwise agreed to by all Advisory Board members. Meeting dates and times shall be advertised in local newspapers or by other means of public dissemination as may be agreed upon by at least a majority of the Advisory Board Membership. All meetings shall be open to the public.

5. Majority Vote

All issues shall be decided by a majority vote of the members of the Advisory Board present at a meeting, except as otherwise stated herein.

6. Records

The Advisory Board shall keep minutes of the proceedings showing the vote of each member upon each question, or if absent or failing to vote, indicating such fact, and shall keep records of its examinations and other official actions, all of which shall be filed in the office of the Advisory Board and shall be a public record.

7. Administrative

The County Planning & Community Development Department will serve the Board for record keeping, correspondence, application procedures under this ordinance, and whatever services the Board needs to complete its duties.

I. Duties

The Advisory Board shall consider the following work items:

1. Review and approve applications for qualified farmland and voluntary agricultural districts and make recommendations concerning the establishment and modification of agricultural districts;
2. Conduct public hearings pursuant to Article X;
3. Advise the Board of Commissioners on projects, programs, or issues affecting the agricultural economy or activities within the county that will affect agricultural districts;
4. Review and make recommendations concerning proposed amendments to this ordinance;
5. Study additional methods of farmland preservation and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners;

6. Perform other agricultural related tasks or duties assigned by the Board of Commissioners;
7. Coordinate with and provide input on changes to County departmental policies related to agricultural issues;
8. Advise the Board of Commissioners and Planning Board on the status, progress, and activities of the county's agricultural district program; and
9. Coordinate the formation and maintenance of agricultural districts with the county's land use planning activities and the county's small area plans.

J. Consultation Authority

The Advisory Board may consult with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, the County Soil & Water Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service office, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and with any other individual, agency, or organization the Advisory Board deems necessary to properly conduct its business.

ARTICLE VI CREATION OF VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS

A. Implementation

In order to implement the purposes stated in Article III, this program provides for the creation of voluntary agricultural districts which meet the following standards:

1. The District shall contain a minimum of twenty (20) contiguous acres of qualified farmland; or
2. The District shall contain two or more qualified farms which contain a minimum of twenty (20) acres total and are located within one mile of each other.

B. Education

The county may take such action as it deems appropriate through the Advisory Board or other entities or individuals to encourage the formation of the Districts and to further their purposes and objectives, including the implementation of a public information program to reasonably inform landowners of the agricultural district program.

C. Withdrawal

In the event that one or more participants in the District withdraw and the acreage in the District becomes less than the minimum acreage required or results in the remaining land being noncontiguous, a voluntary agricultural district will continue to exist so long as there is one qualifying farm.

ARTICLE VII CERTIFICATION AND QUALIFICATION OF FARMLAND

Requirements

To secure county certification as qualifying farmland, a farm must:

1. Be participating in or otherwise qualify for the farm present-use-value taxation program established by N.C.G.S. §105-277.2 through §105-277.7;
2. Be certified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service) of the United States Department of Agriculture as being a farm on which at least two-thirds of the land is composed of soils that:
 - a. Are best suited for providing food, seed, fiber, forage, timber, forestry products, horticultural crops and oil seed crops;
 - b. Have good soil qualities;
 - c. Are favorable for all major crops common to the county where the land is located;
 - d. Have a favorable growing season; and
 - e. Receive the available moisture needed to produce high yields for an average of eight out of ten years.

OR

- Have been actively used in agricultural, horticultural or forestry operations as defined by N.C.G.S. §105-277.2 (1,2,3) during each of the five previous years, measured from the date on which the determination must be made as to whether the land in question qualifies;
3. Be managed, if highly erodible land exists on the farm, in accordance with the Natural Resources Conservation Service defined erosion-control practices that are addressed to said highly-erodible land; and
 4. Be the subject of a conservation agreement, as defined in N.C.G.S. §121-35, between the county and the owner of such land that prohibits non-farm use or development of such land for a period of at least ten years, except for the creation of not more than three lots that meet applicable county zoning and subdivision regulations.

**ARTICLE VIII
APPLICATION, APPROVAL, AND APPEAL PROCEDURE**

A. Application Procedure

1. A landowner may apply to participate in the program by making application to the chairperson of the Advisory Board or a designated staff person. The application shall be on forms provided by the Advisory Board. The application to participate in a district may be filed with the certification for qualifying farmland.
2. An agreement to sustain, encourage, and promote agriculture must be executed by the landowner and recorded with the Advisory Board.

B. Approval Process

1. Upon receipt of a complete application, the chairperson will forward copies immediately to the following offices which shall be asked to provide comments, if any, to the Advisory Board within twenty (20) days of receipt.

- a. The Catawba County tax assessor;
 - b. The Catawba County Soil and Water Conservation District office; and
 - c. The Natural Resources Conservation Service.
2. Upon submission of a complete application to the Advisory Board, the Advisory Board shall meet within sixty (60) days to approve or disapprove the application. The chairperson shall notify the applicant by first class mail of approval or disapproval of participation in the district.

C. Appeal

If an application is denied by the Advisory Board, the petitioner shall have thirty (30) days to appeal the decision to the Board of Commissioners. Such appeal shall be presented in writing. The decision of the Board of Commissioners is final.

**ARTICLE IX
REVOCATION OF PRESERVATION AGREEMENT**

By written notice to the Advisory Board, a landowner of qualifying farmland may revoke the Preservation Agreement or the Advisory Board may revoke the same Preservation Agreement based on noncompliance by the landowner, subject to the same provisions as contained in Article VIII for appeal of denials. Such revocation shall result in loss of qualifying farm status and loss of eligibility to participate in a district. Absent noncompliance by the landowner, neither the Advisory Board nor the Board of Commissioners shall revoke any preservation agreements prior to its expiration.

**ARTICLE X
PUBLIC HEARING FOR CONDEMNATION PROCEEDING**

A. Purpose

Pursuant to N.C.G.S. §106-740, which provides that no state or local public agency or governmental unit may formally initiate any action to condemn any interest in qualifying farmland within a District until such agency or unit has requested the Advisory Board to hold a public hearing on the proposed condemnation. This ordinance shall not be interpreted or construed to limit the County's authority to acquire land within or outside a voluntary agricultural district for a public purpose, whether by purchase or condemnation.

B. Procedure

1. Upon receiving a request, the Advisory Board shall publish notice describing the proposed action in newspapers having general circulation in the County within ten (10) business days of the receipt of the request. The public hearing on the proposed condemnation is to be held within twenty-one (21) days of receipt of the request.
2. The Advisory Board shall meet to review:
 - a. Whether the need for the project has been satisfactorily established by the agency or unit of government involved, including a review of any fiscal impact analysis conducted by the agency involved; and

- b. Whether there are alternatives to the proposed action that have less impact and are less disruptive to the agricultural activities of the District within which the proposed action is to take place.
3. The Advisory Board shall consult with the County Cooperative Extension Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and any other individuals, agencies, or organizations deemed by the Advisory Board to be necessary for its review of the proposed action.
4. Within five (5) days after the hearing, the Advisory Board shall make a report containing its findings and recommendations regarding the proposed action. The report shall be made available to the public prior to it being conveyed to the decision-making body of the agency proposing the acquisition.
5. There will be a period of ten (10) days allowed for public comment on the report of the Advisory Board.
6. After the ten (10) day period for public comment has expired, the Advisory Board shall submit a final report containing all of its findings and recommendations regarding the proposed action to the decision making body of the agency proposing the acquisition.
7. Pursuant to N.C.G.S. §106-740, the Board of Commissioners shall not permit any formal initiation of condemnation by local agencies while the proposed condemnation is properly before the Advisory Board.

ARTICLE XI NOTIFICATION

A Record Notice of Proximity to Voluntary Agricultural District

1. Procedure

Upon certification of qualifying farmland and designation of real property as a District, the listing of that qualifying farmland and real property, which is contained in the Catawba County Geographic Information System (GIS), shall be changed to include a notice reasonably calculated to alert a person researching the title of a particular tract that such tract is located within one-half aerial mile of a voluntary agricultural district.

2. Limit of Liability

In no event shall the County or any of its officers, employees, or agents be held liable in damages for any misfeasance, malfeasance, or nonfeasance occurring in good faith in connection with the duties or obligations imposed by this ordinance.

3. No Cause of Action

In no event shall any cause of action arise out of the failure of a person researching the title of a particular tract to report to any person the proximity of the tract to a qualifying farm or voluntary agricultural district as defined in this ordinance, unless otherwise dictated by law.

B. Signage

Signs identifying approved agricultural districts may be placed along the rights-of-way of major roads that pass through or next to those districts. At least one sign will be posted along the roads as may be deemed appropriate by the Advisory Board, or its administrative agent for the county's agricultural district program.

C. Maps

Maps identifying approved agricultural districts shall be provided to the following agencies or offices:

- a. Register of Deeds;
- b. Natural Resources Conservation Service;
- c. North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service;
- d. County Planning & Community Development;
- e. County Tax Office;
- f. Soil and Water Conservation District; and
- g. Any other such agency or office the Advisory Board deems appropriate.

D. Posting of Notice

The following notice, of a size and form suitable for posting, shall be posted in the office of the Register of Deeds, and any other office or agency the Advisory Board deems necessary.

“Catawba County has established agricultural districts to protect and preserve agricultural lands and activities. These districts have been developed and mapped by the county to inform all purchasers of real property that certain agricultural and forestry activities, including but not limited to pesticide spraying, manure spreading, machinery and truck operation, livestock operations, sawing, and other common farming activities may occur in these districts any time during the day or night. Maps and information on the location and establishment of these districts can be obtained from the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service office, the office of the Register of Deeds, the County Tax Office, the County Planning office, the County Soil & Water Conservation District or the Natural Resources Conservation Service office.”

**ARTICLE XII
SUBDIVISION ORDINANCE AND ZONING ORDINANCE REVIEW**

Developers of major subdivisions or planned unit developments shall designate on preliminary and final development plats, the existence of the Districts within one-half aerial mile of the proposed development.

ARTICLE XIII
WAIVER OF WATER AND SEWER CONNECTION REQUIREMENT AND ASSESMENTS

A. No Assessment

A landowner belonging to the District shall not be assessed for or be required to connect to public water and/or sewer systems except as otherwise required by State Building Code.

In the event that the County adopts a water and sewer assessment ordinance, then the following would apply:

B. Abeyance

Water and sewer assessments shall be held in abeyance, without interest, for farms in an agricultural district, until improvements on such property are connected to the water or sewer system for which the assessment was made.

C. Termination of Abeyance

When the period of abeyance ends, the assessment is payable in accordance with the terms set out in the assessment resolution.

D. Suspension of Statute of Limitations

Statutes of limitations are suspended during the time that any assessment is held in abeyance without interest.

E. Other Statutory Abeyance Procedures

Nothing in this section is intended to diminish the authority of the County to hold assessments in abeyance under N.C.G.S. §153A-201.

F. Conflict with Water and/or Sewer System Construction and Improvements Grants

To the extent that this section conflicts with the terms of federal, state, or other grants under which county water and/or sewer systems are constructed this section shall not apply.

ARTICLE XIV
NORTH CAROLINA AGENCY NOTIFICATION

Annual Report to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

A copy of this ordinance shall be sent to the Office of the North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Board of Commissioners, the County Office of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Soil and Water Conservation District office after adoption. At least annually the county shall submit a written report to the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services on the county's agricultural district program, including the following information:

1. Number of landowners enrolled;
2. Number of acres enrolled;
3. Number of acres certified during the reporting period;

4. Number of acres denied during the reporting period;
5. Copies of any amendments to the ordinance; and
6. Any other information the Advisory Board deems useful.

ARTICLE XV LEGAL PROVISIONS

A. Severability

If any article, section, subsection, clause, phrase, or portion of this ordinance is for any reason found invalid or unconstitutional by any court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this ordinance.

B. Conflict with other Ordinances and Statutes

Whenever the provisions of this ordinance conflict with other ordinances of Catawba County, this ordinance shall govern. Whenever the provisions of any federal or state statute require more restrictive provisions than are required by this ordinance, the provisions of such statute shall govern.

C. Amendments

This ordinance may be amended from time to time by the Board of Commissioners.

ARTICLE XVI ENACTMENT

The Catawba County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts and enacts the preceding articles and sections of this ordinance.

Adopted this the _____ day of _____, 2002.

Motion for adoption by _____ and seconded by _____.

CATAWBA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Chairperson

ATTEST:

Clerk to Board of Commissioners

Approved as to form:

County Attorney